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ABSTRACT

In 1997, the Illinois Legislature passed significant legislation that increased the foundation level for general state aid. Provisions in the legislation for increased teacher accountability included changing the single-level teacher certification system to a multi-tiered process, changing the length of time required before attaining teacher tenure from 2 years to 4 years, and modifying the recertification of teacher certificates to include proof of continuing professional growth. The language used in the Illinois House Bill 542 (Public Act 90-548) suggests that the Illinois State Legislature does not believe school districts are keeping teachers abreast of current instructional practices and teachers are not taking the initiative to keep current. The bill allows teacher unions to select the majority of teachers for local professional development committees, which may not provide the best teachers for determining appropriate staff development. Teachers will need to attend approved workshops, conferences, or courses, though it is doubtful that doing so will significantly increase student learning more than prior recertification practices. The Initial, Standard, and Master certificates may result in a three-tiered pay schedule. Given that the elected regional superintendents will play significant roles in the appeal process, politics could play a role in a recertification appeal. (Contains 10 references.) (RT)

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ILLINOIS EDUCATIONAL RECERTIFICATION: IMPACT ON LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND STATE CONTROL

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BACKGROUND

In the 1980's the publication entitled A Nation at Risk sounded an alarm regarding the quality of teaching and learning in American schools. While most of the early national reform efforts focused on curricular initiatives, the National Commission of Teaching and America's Future in 1994 shifted the focus to issues relating to teacher quality. This was accomplished by raising questions concerning teacher preservice and continuing education for licensure and recertification (Shea). Responses have included teacher testing, additional staff development activities, and the launching of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The NBPTS established a program to identify Master Teachers in all fifty states.

National legislation underscored the concern regarding teacher quality. President Clinton's 1998 proposal to reduce class size in the primary grades to a national average of 18 students per teacher contained two provisions, which were designed to increase the quality of teaching. Ten percent of the funds could be used to promote high quality teaching through teacher training in the 'best practices' and teacher testing to obtain a certificate. Lastly, Clinton's proposal encouraged states to adopt rigorous professional and subject matter tests and increased certification and recertification requirements (American Association of School Administrators).

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Compared to other states, even those in the Midwest, Illinois has been slow to develop increased requirements for teacher certification. For many years, teachers renewed their teaching certificates by only paying a $4 annual registration fee or $12 for three years. The majority of these limited funds was used by local school districts for staff development. The recent passage of the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, which requires continuing education for recertification of teachers, caused Illinois State Superintendent McGee to form a commission to develop language for the final legislation. Because of the political nature of the subject, the commission was composed of teacher union members, school management and business representatives. The resulting legislation reflected compromise language (Illinois Education Association).

LEGISLATIVE SYNOPSIS

In 1997, the Illinois Legislature passed significant legislation known as House Bill 542 (Public Act 90-548), which increased the foundation level for general state aid. Also included in the legislation were provisions for increased teacher accountability in an apparent attempt to positively impact student performance. These included:

- changing the single-level teacher certification system to a multi-tiered process;
- changing the length of time required before attaining teacher tenure from two years to four years; and
- modifying the recertification of teacher certificates to include proof of continuing professional growth (Illinois State Board of Education, 1999).

In February 2000 Illinois officially modified its traditional certification to three

Levels: Initial Certificates, Standard Certificates, and Master Certificates. Implementation will take place over three years (2000 – 2002) and requires teachers' submission of recertification plans. It will impact Early Childhood, Elementary, Secondary, and Special Certificate holders. After the certificates have been initially exchanged, the Standard Certificates will be valid for five years and Master Certificates will be valid for ten years. At the expiration of the new certificates, teachers must have completed the plan requirements. It is conceivable that teachers who do not have to renew existing certificates until 2002 with the new Standard Certificates will not have to write a plan for three years and, then, have five additional years to complete the requirements of the plan. Therefore, some teachers will have up to eight years to complete the entire process from the initial implementation of the recertification law.

The new Standard and Master Certificates will be identified as valid and active or valid and inactive. Teachers actively employed in teacher-certificated positions would be valid and active and must develop Certificate Renewal Plans. Inactive teachers are those not currently employed in teaching positions requiring certification or those in the private sector and, therefore, would be considered valid and inactive (Illinois State Board of Education, 2000).

At the time the certificates are transposed into the new certificates, teachers must develop Certificate Renewal Plans outlining the activities which must be accomplished in order to renew the certificates after the five or ten year period when certificates must be renewed. The Certificate Renewal Plan must include:

1. at least three personal goals for improvement;
2. for each goal, a statement of the knowledge and skill(s) to be enhanced, reflecting relevant professional teaching or content area standards;
3. proposed professional development activities or types of activities;

4. the goals and purposes that the proposed activities address; and
5. projected timelines for completing the activities within the five- and ten-year period of certificate validity (Illinois State Board of Education, 2000).

These plans are to be submitted and approved by the Local Professional Development Committee (LPDC) made up of three classroom teachers, one administrator, and one at-large member (parent, business or community member, or administrator). This committee must approve or deny the plans, award or deny credits for professional activities, review all applications for renewal, and make recommendations for renewal or nonrenewal to the regional superintendent. Each district is required to have at least one LPDC.

Each plan needs to include the activities that will be accomplished in order to generate the equivalent of 120 continuing professional development units (CPDU). Each unit is equal to one clock hour. Therefore, one semester hour of college credit at an accredited college or university is equal to 15 CPDUs. There are four ways to accomplish professional development credit:

- earning semester hours for completing coursework in an education-related program at an accredited college or university;
- participating in workshops, seminars, conferences, and other events for which continuing education credits (CEUs) are issued by providers approved to issue them;
- participating in any of a wide range of activities for which continuing professional development units (CPDUs) are available; or
- accumulating any combination of these three forms of credit (Illinois State Board of Education, 2000).

Certificate Renewal Plans can be revised during the renewal cycle. After completion of all the plan activities, the teacher submits evidence of completion to the LPDC. The LPDC recommends renewal or nonrenewal of the certificate(s). If the LPDC recommends nonrenewal, the teacher may request reconsideration by the LPDC.

The LPDC will decide whether to reconsider the nonrenewal and forward its decision to the regional superintendent. If the LPDC continues to recommend nonrenewal, the teacher may appeal to the Regional Committee (RPDRC). The RPDRC makes a recommendation and notifies the regional superintendent. The regional superintendent reviews the plan and makes a recommendation to the State Certification Board. In turn, the State Board convenes a hearing and notifies the teacher of its decision. Finally, the case may go to court for administrative review. Throughout the process, teachers have the right to challenge recommendations for nonrenewal (Illinois State Board of Education, 2000).

POSSIBLE IMPACTS OF ILLINOIS RECERTIFICATION LEGISLATION

The efforts of the Illinois legislature have been aimed at improving the education of Illinois children. Licensure of teachers through recertification strikes at the core of these efforts. Time devoted to instruction and the quality of that instruction are the foundations for exemplary education.

Deans of Education of ten major Schools of Education recently addressed the problem of failing schools. Included was the following statement:

> For 30 years, research has shown what makes an effective school where teaching and learning take place: high expectations and standards for all students, curricula that mirror the standards, appropriate methods of standards-based assessment, strong principals, a safe and orderly environment, a high degree of parental involvement, teachers who are well-prepared in content and pedagogy, ongoing professional development for all teachers and accountability throughout the school (Dorr, et al).

Of these nine components, the recently enacted recertification law appears to address two of them: (1) teachers who are well prepared in content and pedagogy and (2) ongoing professional development. This paper examines possible impacts this

legislation has on three aspects of school operation and organization: (1) collective bargaining, (2) financial support, and (3) state versus local control.

Collective Bargaining

Under the new law the system's recertification intent is to improve student achievement by helping teachers keep up-to-date in their current fields of teaching, in areas designated by the State Board of Education as high priorities for all teachers, and in areas relevant to their own local school improvement plans (Illinois Administrative Code). Each teacher must develop a Continuing Professional Development Plan (CPDP) and present it to a Local Professional Development Committee (LPDC), which will judge its merits and ultimately determine whether or not its objectives have been met.

As indicated earlier, each district is obligated to determine the number of LPDCs needed in the district. Each committee will have at least five members, three of which must be classroom teachers, one may be the district's superintendent or a designee, and one will be an at-large member. The committee may be larger, but teacher representation must be the majority. The district's teacher union must select the teacher representatives on the committee. "The exclusive representative, if any, shall select the classroom teacher members of the local professional development committee. If no exclusive representative exists, then the classroom teacher members of a local professional development committee shall be selected by the classroom teachers that come within the local professional development committee's authority" (Illinois Attorney General). All actions of an LPDC require that a majority of the committee members be present, and no committee action may be taken unless 50% or more of those present are teacher members (Rose and Hernandez).

These provisions seem to encourage union organization of non-union districts and, in those districts that are unionized, place a great deal of power in controlling staff recertification and, it is presumed, employment. "Absent initial bargaining, districts will have little if any control over how the LPDCs do their work...."(Rose and Hernandez).

Unions have already put forward a number of bargaining issues.

1. Number and organization of LPDCs.
2. Number of members on LPDCs.
3. Indemnification of LPDC members from lawsuits.
4. Term of office.
5. Location of LPDC meetings.
6. Compensation and release time for teachers or other non-administrative certified staff who serve as members of LPDCs.
7. Administrative support to be provided to committees.
8. Salary schedule advancement for CRP (Certificate Renewal Plan) activities.
9. Tuition reimbursement for CRP activities.
10. Modifying district in-service programs to facilitate the meetings of CRP Activities.
11. Special compensation for Master Teachers (Rose and Hernandez).

In addition, other topics seem conducive to union bargaining, such as financial remuneration for all CRP activities, including training. Other activities involved in the legislation may also receive attention, such as, consequences for teachers failing to prepare an approved CRP within an acceptable time frame, and what happens to teachers who do not obtain certificate renewal (Rose and Hernandez). Furthermore, the statute requires that "all individuals selected to serve on LPDCs must be known to demonstrate the best practices in teaching of their respective field of practice" (Illinois Attorney General). How will this be determined and by whom?

Financial Support

The State of Illinois presently, on average, financially supports its school districts at a level considerably less than the per capita cost. Many school districts throughout the state are not able to fund a quality school system, therefore, it is critical that laws requiring greater funding be subsidized by the state, including the curriculum development requirements, the testing requirements, the Charter Schools laws, and the recertification process. Under the latter process, each district will receive a grant from ISBE of approximately $1,000 for the "reasonable costs" associated with conducting the recertification committee meetings (Rose and Hernandez).

Other costs may increase because of recertification requirements. For instance, most, if not all, school districts have many committees in operation. Many of these committees revolve around various curricular components. If teachers were to be paid for committee involvement, the additional costs accruing to the district could be extensive. Yet, these committees are vital to the instructional programs of the school, as well as teacher job satisfaction. It does not appear reasonable to pay teachers for working on LPDCs, but not for working on other committees. On the other hand, for those districts that do pay for committee work, the possible increased costs for LPDCs may put pressure on the district to use the same pay scale for all committees.

State vs. Local Control

There is no question that the State of Illinois has authority for education (Bradley, et al). However, recent actions of the Illinois General Assembly seem to have increased responsibility of local boards to produce schools of greater quality (Bradley, et al). Examples of this increased responsibility are the legislative imperative of the '70s for each district to formulate learning objectives; of the '80s which developed K-12 State Goals for Learning and the Illinois Goal Achievement Program (IGAP); and of the '90s in redefining the state assessment program and a reforming of IGAP into the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE). The new century appears to have placed additional demands, this time in the recertification process, upon local boards.

It is generally recognized that good teaching is a melding of procedures that represent both art and science. A teacher must know what he/she is teaching, but must also have the ability to instill in youngsters a love of learning, excitement in the process, and a curiosity that will result in both. Will the new recertification procedures accomplish this?

CONCLUSIONS

1. Apparently, the legislature does not believe school districts are keeping teachers abreast of current instructional practices.

2. The legislature may not believe teachers are taking the initiative to keep current.

3. The State Board seemingly believes school teachers are better able to determine the specific types of activities teachers need to improve instruction rather than the board and/or administration.

4. Allowing unions to select the majority of teachers for the LPDC may not provide the best teachers for determining appropriate staff development action.

5. The LPDC recertification committee is a boost for teachers' unions.

6. It is doubtful that approved workshops, conferences, and courses will significantly increase student learning more than prior recertification practices.

7. The LPDC process will increase district costs on an accelerated basis.

8. Building principals, recognized as being the instructional leaders in the development of quality schools, do not seem to be in a position to influence staff development activities.

9. The Initial, Standard, and Master certificates may result in a 3-tiered pay schedule.

10. Given the elected regional superintendents will play significant roles in the appeal process, politics could play a role in a recertification appeal.

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